

TESTIMONY PREPARED FOR THE CT APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

By GREATER NEW BRITAIN TEEN PREGNANCY PREVENTION, INC.

2/17/10

Good evening honorable members of the state's Appropriations Committee. My name is RoseAnne Bilodeau. I am the executive director of Greater New Britain Teen Pregnancy Prevention, Inc., also known as the Pathways/Senderos Center.

I am here this evening to request your support for youth job training especially summer youth employment and learning programs. At Pathways/Senderos, we provide daily programming, 52 weeks per year. Although a teen pregnancy prevention program, our successfully-evaluated methodology also serves to reduce school drop outs while simultaneously preparing youngsters to achieve self-sufficient adulthoods. We do that by providing wholistic, comprehensive, long term service delivery to 60 high risk New Britain girls and boys. Our adolescents are all poverty-stricken. Most come from single parent households where the mother is under-educated and marginally employed. The vast majority of youngsters come into our program with limited or unrealistic aspirations for their adult lives. Some want to grow up to play professional basketball or perform with 50 cent. Our staff never trample on a youth's dreams for the future but they do guide them towards more realistic careers. Utilizing the Department of Labor's website, we teach youngsters about the myriad of vocations and professions available to them and what is needed to attain these desirable positions. Our youngsters learn about the potential for wages, benefits and other perks associated with different career fields. They also learn the importance of academic achievement and a strong work ethic as the avenue to most high-paying jobs.

At Pathways/Senderos, we emphasize the ongoing enhancement of our children's literacy skills. Almost all of our students are Latino and for whom English is a second language. We stress the

importance of being fluent in both languages, English and Spanish. We stress the importance of not only graduating from high school but also going on to some type of post-secondary education or training. The vast majority of our graduates go on to 4-year universities – all are the first in their families to do so.

In the past, we have been able to provide these services for our high school youth with youth employment and training dollars. This year, we lost that support and our offerings have dwindled significantly. We are no longer able to take our youngsters on college tours. Our outreach to role model presenters has almost been eliminated; and now we look forward to the summer with heavy hearts.

Our youngsters are good kids. They are all categorized as urban youth. They all come from income eligible homes which means that they are all poverty-stricken. The vast majority live in single-parent families where youngsters have no choice but to help provide income for their families' survival. Summer youth employment and learning programs help our youngsters gain valuable job training skills while concurrently paying them a small amount of money which helps with their families and purchases clothes and other necessities for the youth. As I mention previously, at Pathways/Senderos, we focus on English literacy. Thus in our Summer Youth Employment and Learning project, our youngsters write books, create websites and engage in other activities specifically designed to help them break out of the cycle of poverty.

Please don't take this valuable support program away from the youngsters who need it the most, our poverty-stricken adolescents – teens who were born poor. They are youngsters who were dealt a low-blow at birth, through no fault of their own. Due to the disadvantages caused by poverty, their academic and social development has been impaired. These hardships do not have to remain as

lifelong realities. Your support for youth employment and training will help these young people to gain the background and skills that they'll need to fully enter the labor force and break the chains of poverty.